

## Talking Points and Fact Sheet on I-81 FEIS

If you are writing to Governor Kaine and other officials you may use any of the information here. You can save time by using issues raised by the bold text.

### **VDOT's Final EIS Report on I-81 is UNREASONABLE**

**VDOT promotes only the most costly and destructive option for I-81—widening to eight lanes in most places.**

Pursuant to legislation passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2006, Norfolk Southern and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation are conducting a study to determine what improvements would be needed to divert 60 percent of the freight from through truck traffic from I-81 to rail.

Despite the fact that Norfolk Southern projects that most through freight can be diverted at a fraction of the cost of adding four lanes to I-81, VDOT proposes to move forward with widening before the study is completed.

If VDOT does not change course, billions of dollars of state and federal money will be wasted on projects that are uneconomical and extremely damaging to the air, land, and waters of the Shenandoah Valley and Southwest Virginia.

**VDOT's proposal improperly rejects "Reasonable Solutions for I-81"<sup>1</sup> – site specific improvements and diversion of freight to rail – endorsed by 34 local governments and community organizations in the Shenandoah Valley.**

VDOT's earlier studies indicated that spot improvements offer an affordable option to address trouble spots on I-81 and that truck traffic was the major safety and congestion problem. The Shenandoah Valley Network's technical analysis of VDOT's study shows that VDOT's conclusions are wrong. SVN confirmed that I-81 faces three problems: specific safety problems along about 10% of the 325 mile corridor; long-distance freight traveling through Virginia; and local traffic. This in turn requires three separate solutions: targeted safety fixes, freight rail and better local land use and street networks. Shenandoah Valley Network and Coalition for Smarter Growth comments can be viewed at: (OUR WEB LINK)

As the state grapples with a tremendous transportation funding crisis, it is unreasonable to reject the more targeted and affordable approach of Reasonable Solutions.

VDOT continues to rely on its badly flawed analysis of rail (which only studied improvements within Virginia) to justify excluding rail freight diversion as an option for I-81. The state and Norfolk Southern railroad joint study of rail freight diversion (an initial

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<sup>1</sup> The six-point Reasonable Solutions for I-81 resolution has been endorsed by: Augusta, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Clarke and Albemarle Counties; City of Roanoke; Towns of Front Royal, Tom's Brook, New Market, Edinburg, Mt. Jackson; Shenandoah Valley Travel Association, Virginia Hospitality & Travel Association; Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, Civil War Preservation Trust, National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Parks Conservation Association; Rail Solution; Shenandoah Valley Network (Augusta Community Partnership, Rockingham CAP, Shenandoah Forum, Scenic 340 Project), Valley Conservation Council; Edinburg Chamber of Commerce; Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Shenandoah Resource Conservation & Development Council, Virginia Conservation Network, Virginia League of Conservation Voters; Pure Water Forum; Potomac Conservancy; Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River; Shenandoah Preservation League

report is due this summer) holds much promise. It is unreasonable to exclude rail freight from the I-81 FEIS.

**VDOT's plan calls for 80 percent of I-81 in the Shenandoah Valley to be widened to eight lanes, leading to significant destruction of the scenic beauty, history and tourist economy in the Valley.**

I-81 crosses the Shenandoah Valley for 120 miles each way from the southern border of Augusta County to the West Virginia line in Frederick County. VDOT wants to widen 193 of those miles to eight lanes. Only 47 miles would remain four lanes wide, and 14 of those miles are in Harrisonburg where VDOT proposes a bypass.

**Because VDOT failed to consider more reasonable, less expensive alternative, its plan can only be funded through tolls which were opposed by 80% of those submitting written comments and are opposed by major industries.**

The FEIS estimate that widening I-81 to eight lanes in most places will cost between \$7.2 and \$11 billion. The only way VDOT can secure that level of funding is through tolls on at least trucks and perhaps cars. Ignoring the industry comments ranging from trucking companies to manufacturers to the Valley's poultry industry, VDOT claims that tolls will have a positive impact on the Valley's economy and that few trucks will divert to US 11 and other local roads.

The **Virginia Poultry Growers Cooperative** says, "tolls will be devastating to the poultry industry."

The **Virginia Trucking Association** says, "the imposition of tolls to use I-81 will cause diversion of a significant number of trucks onto alternative routes along the I-81 corridor and other interstates in Virginia. ... We are certain that the residents who use the roads that will experience significant increases in the number of trucks diverting from I-81 do not view the impact of the diversion as 'relatively low.' ... We believe the DEIS has grossly underestimated the degree of diversion that will occur."

**VDOT is using the Tier I and Tier 2 phased studies to avoid an adequate corridor-wide and comprehensive environmental assessment of the impacts of major highway widening.**

Throughout the I-81 planning process, VDOT has maintained that it does not need to look at the specific impacts I-81 widening could have on Virginia's economy and environment in "Tier 1" because those impacts will be assessed by segment in "Tier 2."

Now VDOT is asking the FHWA for permission to forgo a full environmental impact statement in Tier 2 and to move forward by segment with either no analysis (called a categorical exclusion) or limited analysis (called an environmental assessment).

In either event the largest construction project in the history of the Commonwealth, if not the nation, will be undertaken without a substantial analysis of the impact it will have on the economy, clean air, clean water, land use, or historic resources.

**VDOT is attempting to restart the Harrisonburg Bypass which would destroy battlefields and agricultural areas and has been rejected in the SE Harrisonburg Bypass DEIS.**

While they conducted no analysis of the impacts, in Harrisonburg, “FHWA and VDOT propose to evaluate moving I-81 to a new location, as well as widening the existing facility” because “the impacts from the potential I-81 improvement concept, especially displacements, may rise to the level where a corridor on new location may be prudent.”

“The geographic extent of the general location of a potential corridor on new location in the Harrisonburg section of I-81 extends approximately two miles east and west of I-81 from approximately Milepost 243 to approximately Milepost 251.”

Yet, Harrisonburg and Rockingham officials have rejected a full bypass in favor of more local road improvements. This bypass would endanger yet another Civil War Battlefield and cut through designated agricultural areas of the county.

## VDOT's PROPOSED LANE EXPANSIONS TO 8-LANES

Table ES-5 Additional General Purpose Lane Requirements in Sections of Independent Utility (SIU)\*

In the Shenandoah Valley

| SIU Termini   |                              | Additional General   |            |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Mile Marker   |                              | Purpose Lanes Needed |            |
| From  | To                           | Northbound           | Southbound |
| <b>Interstate 581 (Roanoke) to Exit 221 (Staunton)</b>      |                              |                      |            |
| 205 Augusta Line  | 221 Staunton                 | Two lanes            | Two lanes  |
| <b>Exit 221 (Staunton) Exit 247 Route 33 (Harrisonburg)</b> |                              |                      |            |
| 221 Staunton  | 243 US 11 south Harrisonburg | Two lanes            | Two lanes  |
| 243 US 11 south   | 245 Port Republic Road       | One lane             | One lane   |
| 245 Port Republic Road                                      | 247 Route 33 Harrisonburg    | Two lanes            | One lane   |
| <b>Route 33 (Harrisonburg) to Interstate 66</b>             |                              |                      |            |
| 247 Route 33 Harrisonburg                                   | 251 US 11 north Harrisonburg | One lane             | One lane   |
| 251 US 11 north Harrisonburg                                | 257 Mauzy                    | Two lanes            | Two lanes  |
| 257 Mauzy   | 264 New Market               | One lane             | Two lanes  |
| 264 New Market  | 269 Shenandoah Caverns       | One lane             | One lane   |
| 269 Shenandoah Caverns                                      | 273 Mount Jackson            | Two lanes            | One lane   |
| 273 Mount Jackson   | 277 Bowmans Crossing         | One lane             | One lane   |
| 277 Bowmans Crossing  | 279 Edinburg                 | One lane             | Two lanes  |
| 279 Edinburg  | 300 Interstate 66            | Two lanes            | Two lanes  |
| <b>Interstate 66 to State Line</b>                          |                              |                      |            |
| 300 Interstate 66   | 310 Route 37 Kernstown       | Two lanes            | Two lanes  |
| 310 Route 37  | 313 Route 50 Winchester      | One lane             | One lane   |
| 313 Route 50 Winchester                                     | 325 State Line               | Two lanes            | Two lanes  |

\* By defining "Sections of Independent Utility" VDOT could potentially build these individual sections without full environmental evaluation. Categorical Exclusions from any environmental review or shorter Environmental Assessments will be used.

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